



Virginia Lee Gurnea

May 20, 1921 - July 12, 2019

On Friday, July 12th, 2019, beloved mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Virginia Lee Gurnea passed away at the age of 98. Virginia was born in Dinuba, CA, on May 20th, 1921, the only child of Chester and Virginia Lewis. She lived a carefree childhood surrounded by close-knit friends and traveled all over America on road trips with her parents. Some of her fondest memories were of spending summers with her parents and her extended family in Kentucky each year.

Virginia attended Mills College, where she married her great love, Billy Ray Gurnea on September 12th, 1941. Together the two raised their son, William and their two daughters, Louise and Nancye. Virginia taught music to various grade levels at numerous school sites throughout Visalia Unified for years. For over three decades, she also opened her home to teach private violin lessons to hundreds of students in the Central Valley. Her passion cultivated a love for music among so many youths in this area. She was known for her gentle patience with students, as well as her great skill and perfect pitch. Several family and community members recall warmly her ability to accurately guess any note or chord played on the piano, by ear alone. An accomplished musician, Virginia played as a founding member of the Sequoia Symphony Orchestra (formerly known as the Tulare County Symphony) for forty years. Additionally, she performed with the Kaweah String Quartet, Bakersfield Symphony, Fresno Philharmonic, and with such acts as Smokey Robinson,

Nat King Cole, and Carmen Dragon, among others. She also contributed to a vibrant, local musical community that volunteered their talents to provide live music for any musicals put on by Visalia high schools or College of the Sequoias.

Virginia is remembered for her easy smile and playful laugh. When wishing someone well as they departed for a trip or an adventurous experience, she would often repeat the refrain, "don't do anything I wouldn't" then with a giggle and a wink she would finish, "and that leaves you a lot of leeway." Virginia was ever the lady in etiquette, generosity, and encouragement: offering her two cents with equal parts sweetness and sass. Virginia lived her life with resiliency and joy, strongly connected to her family and to so many dear friends. Her children remember holidays spent engaging in simple pleasures like camping and fishing with several other families they grew up alongside. Virginia loved spending time in the mountains immensely. She especially enjoyed bird-watching and had a hidden talent for sketching nature. She loved to dance and engage in sports like tennis and golf. She had a special affinity for all things chocolate and kept sweets on hand for any surprise guests who should happen to stop by. With a parting candy, she would notoriously chime a cheerful, "come again soon!" Although the loss of her humor and light weighs heavily on her family, they are comforted by the hope that she is now at rest, wholly healed from all discomfort or limitations, and reunited with so many whom she loved.

Virginia was preceded in death by her infant daughter, Mary Lee; her parents, Chester and Virginia; her husband, Billy; her son-in-law, Paul Gutierrez; and by many other relatives and close friends. She is survived by her son William and his wife Angela; her daughter Louise Gutierrez; her daughter and son-in-law, Nancye and Mark Doggett; her granddaughter and grandson-in-law, ReNelle and Daniel Rice; her grandson Jon Burnea; her granddaughter Charissa Burnea; and her two great-granddaughters Ava and Sloane Rice.

A celebration of Virginia's life will be held at Rise Church in Visalia on Friday, July 19th, at 11:00 AM: 5702 W. Caldwell, Visalia, CA 93277.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Sequoia Symphony Orchestra, PO Box 1201, Visalia, CA, 93279, an organization that Virginia supported and valued throughout her life.

Previous Events

Memorial

JUL 19. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (PT)

Visalia Rise Church
Visalia, CA

Tribute Wall

RR

“ 1 file added to the album *Virginia Gurnea Memorial*



ReNelle Rice - July 18, 2019 at 08:56 PM

DS

She was the best music teacher ever. So very patient and open-minded. I'll always treasure the lessons I had with her.

Delight Blackman Schwartz - April 17, 2022 at 09:08 PM

BB

“ *We always enjoyed speaking with Virginia when we attended Rise Church with Jim and Lori. We will miss our conversations with her and are very sorry for the family loss.*

Brian & Alice Bunch - July 18, 2019 at 03:49 PM

JM

“ *We loved Virginia and were blessed to have known her! We are grateful for the times we were able to speak with her at church. Our condolences go out to Bill, Angie, Charissa, ReNelle, Jon, and her other family members. We will miss Virginia until we see her again.*

Jim and Lori McClintick - July 18, 2019 at 03:46 PM